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REPORTS

TO THE

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOARD

ON

PUBLIC HEALTH AND MEDICAL
SUBJECTS.

(NEW SERIES No. 33.)

Dr. J. Spencer Low's Report to the Local
Government Board on the Sanitary Cir-
cumstances and Administration of the
Altofts Urban District.



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Dr. J. Spencer Low's Report to the Local Government Board on the Sanitary Circumstances and Administration of the Altofts Urban District.

ARTHUR NEWSHOLME,

Medical Officer,

May 30th, 1910.

The Altofts Urban District, with an area of 1,838 acres, is bounded on the north and west by the Methley and Stanley Urban Districts and by the River Calder: on the south-east by the Normanton Urban District, and on the south by the Wakefield Rural District. The population in the census years 1881, 1891, and 1901 was 3,172, 3,791, and 4,024 respectively: it is at present estimated at 4,555. The number of inhabited houses in these census years was 589, 668, and 803 respectively: the present number has been estimated at 944.*

The rateable value is £35,555 and the assessable value £29,250: there are no loans outstanding. For the last five years the poor rate has varied from 2s. 10d. to 3s. in the pound, and the general district rate from 2s. to 2s. 3d.

The chief industry of the district is coal mining and in a lesser degree agriculture and railway work.

Geologically, Altofts is situated on the Middle Coal Measures, the soil being alluvium and clay, with sandstone near the surface in some places.

The urban district is traversed by a high road from Wakefield to Castleford and Pontefract, by the Aire and Calder canal, by the Midland Railway main line, and for a short distance by the York and Normanton branch of the North Eastern Railway.

* The inspector of nuisances found, as the result of an informal census taken early in 1910, that the population was 4,436, residing in 927 houses, the number shown upon the rate books.

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Sanitary Circumstances.

Housing.—The inhabitants of Altofts are fairly well accommodated in brick houses which are mostly slated. The ordinary cottage in this district contains a living room and kitchen on the ground floor, with two or three bedrooms upstairs: rents for such dwellings vary from 4s. 6d. to 6s. a week, including rates. There are said to be nearly 100 baths in the district, but they are not provided in the class of house commonly occupied by colliers. There are no unoccupied houses in Altofts, but a builder is at present carrying out a scheme which will provide some 34 houses. There are 79 back-to-back houses; some dwellings have neither back doors nor back windows. Silkstone Row consists of 52 houses, three storeys in height, ranged in one row 300 yards long, without a break of any sort: this arrangement interferes with the circulation of air about the houses in streets behind.

Messrs. Pope and Pearson, Ltd. (colliery owners) have for several years kept a small staff of men steadily employed on their house property in making improvements, such as providing sinks inside the houses, paving yards, fixing slop gullies, and so forth. Although considerable progress has already been made, much work of this sort remains to be done.*

Few cases of overcrowding or of houses kept in a dirty state come to the notice of the inspector of nuisances. In the case of Messrs. Pope and Pearson's property he has only to report the matter at the colliery offices to secure abatement.

Defects in housing in Altofts relate principally not to the houses themselves, but to their surroundings. Back yards and back lanes are in many cases defectively paved, or are not paved at all, even round middens: vegetable refuse, tea leaves and ashes are thrown about the yards.*

Considerable damage to houses has been done in recent years by subsidence due to mining.

Water Supply is derived from the Wakefield Corporation's reservoirs at Ardsley where the water is treated with finely ground chalk and, after filtration, with lime, to remove its plumbosolvent action. No storage reservoir is provided for Altofts, but recently a connection has been made between a main in Altofts and another main of the Wakefield Corporation which carries water to Castleford, so that in the event of any accident to the pipes bringing water to Altofts, a supply could be obtained through this connection. No extra water charge is levied for water closets or for baths. The supply is laid on practically to every house in the district.

Sewerage and sewage disposal.—The district was sewered in 1878-79 and outfall works were then provided: these works became unsatisfactory and a new scheme of sewage disposal was carried out in 1904. Sewage now passes through a screening chamber to a storage tank and a pump well from which it is

* After a survey of the district in 1904, the county medical officer reported that many houses required sinks (in 1910 they numbered 798); also that yards and side streets should be properly levelled and paved or laid with suitable materials.

pumped to a tank, of which the contents discharge on to three primary filter beds made of clinker and ashes: the effluent then passes through a secondary filter bed, and finally discharges into the Choke Churl beck. The West Riding Rivers Board appear to be satisfied with the effluent produced.

Land at the sewage works is sometimes irrigated with sewage, but it is mainly used for the treatment of sludge.

The sewers, which receive also storm water, are flushed several times a year from water carts.

In recent years, improvement has been effected in the ventilation of sewers by the provision of numerous vertical air shafts.

Some houses in Foxholes Lane discharge slop water into a roadside ditch, of which the contents ultimately enter the sewers: a scheme is in hand, and will shortly be carried out, to lay a sewer down this lane, to connect house drains with it, and to provide a small filter bed for sewage purification. The effluent will be discharged into the ditch mentioned above and will be treated again at the main sewage works.

House drainage.—Drains laid in recent years are provided with inspection chambers, intercepting traps, and ventilating shafts. New drains are usually tested by the inspector of nuisances with smoke or water.

Kitchen sinks are now being provided to discharge over a gulley in the yard, but slop water frequently overflows the shallow dish-stones and fouls the surrounding surface of the ground.

Occasionally rain pipes, in Brook and George Streets for instance, are connected directly with the drains.

Excrement disposal and removal.—The privy midden is the usual mode of disposal of excrement in Altofts, but open middens with bottoms below the ground level are few in number. There are about 700 privies, and in some instances five or six privies are associated with one pit. Generally each house has its own closet. Many middens have been reconstructed, some on the cupboard principle, where excrement is received in a small concrete chamber and ashes are added from the front after the hinged seat is lifted. Removal of the contents of such privies is effected at the back through a door which is kept locked. These small privies are emptied every one or two weeks. The ordinary large middens are emptied about once in eight weeks.

Removal is effected by the council's staff, working at night. A very unsatisfactory feature of the system is that the midden contents are first of all thrown out on the unpaved surface of yards or back streets, and in some 80 instances where no secondary means of access exists, carts cannot enter yards, and this foul smelling mass has to be wheeled through narrow yard passages into the streets where it is again thrown out on the surface of the ground before it is finally shovelled into a cart for removal to agricultural land. Numerous examples of this state of affairs are to be found in Brook and George Streets, Patience Lane and High Green Road, although the two latter places contain some of the better houses in Altofts.

A site for a tip has been secured in an isolated position between the canal and the river, but it has not as yet been necessary to use

it. I noted an instance where midden contents were being spread on land close to a main road, a railway station, and dwelling houses.

There are 12 water closets on the "tippler" principle. The number of ordinary water closets is about 200; some progress has been made in converting dilapidated midden privies into water closets, and in case of new houses in very recent years, water closets have always been provided. This policy, however, should have been adopted very much sooner: it is not uncommon to see in Altofts blocks of midden privies, structurally in excellent condition, which have been erected only a few years ago, sometimes in place of old dilapidated privies.

The attention of the council should be directed to section 39, subsection 2, of the Public Health Acts Amendment Act, 1907, in relation to the compulsory provision of water closets for new houses.

Refuse disposal and removal.—Refuse is disposed of in about 500 middens, in 50 dry covered ashpits or in 57 movable sanitary dustbins: the latter are emptied weekly, the ashpits at varying intervals. House refuse is carted with the midden contents on to the land, or it is used to fill up a hollow near the council's dépôt, where a fire is lighted and combustible stuff is burnt. Since the council took over the scavenging from their contractors, much improvement in efficiency seems to have resulted, though that system, it has to be admitted, was an improvement on the old method of leaving the matter to the owners and occupiers.

There are six *slaughter houses*. Several are in situations open to grave objection, being in close proximity to dwellings, and two of them are in common yards. In some, the drain inlets are inside the slaughter house, in others the flooring is defective. Some slaughter houses are not kept in a cleanly state. There are 15 registered *cowkeepers*. In most instances, their premises are structurally in a satisfactory condition, being adequately floored, lighted, ventilated and drained. As a general rule, however, the hind quarters of the cows, and often their udders, were found thickly coated with dung. Much structural improvement has been effected in the cowsheds in recent years and elementary notions of cleanliness should now be impressed upon the cowkeepers.*

There are no *common lodging houses*, *milk shops*, or *bakehouses* in the district.

The premises of the sellers of *fried fish* are well kept.

Sanitary Administration.

The Altofts Urban District Council consists of six members, who meet monthly: there is no Sanitary Committee. Meetings are attended by the medical officer of health and inspector of nuisances, who submit written reports. No particular scheme of sanitary importance was before the council at the time of my visit, except the sewer extension at Foxholes Lane, to which allusion has already been made.

The provisions of the Infectious Disease Notification Act, 1889, which was adopted in 1891, were extended to include measles in

* The county medical officer reported in 1904 that the facts he had collected "affords ample justification for denouncing the conditions under which milk is produced in this district."

1896. The Private Streets Works Act, 1892, was adopted in 1896. The council should make application to the Board for the issue of an Order declaring to be in force in the district such of the Parts or Sections of the Public Health Acts Amendment Act, 1907, as are likely to prove of service in the district.

Byelaws on the following subjects were allowed by the Board on July 22nd, 1876, viz. :—

New streets and buildings, Prevention of nuisances, Slaughter houses.

These byelaws are now quite out of date, and byelaws framed on the Board's present model series should be adopted without delay.*

Regulations under the Dairies, Cowsheds, and Milkshops Order were made in 1906 at the Board's instance.

The *medical officer of health*, Dr. R. B. Sandiford, L.R.C.P. and S. (Edin.), L.F.P.S. (Glas.), was appointed in 1909 (having acted as temporary medical officer of health since October, 1908) at an annual salary of £25, half of which is repaid by the County Council. This salary is not adequate.

Dr. Sandiford is district medical officer and public vaccinator in the Wakefield Union, police surgeon, certifying factory surgeon, and, until lately, he acted as medical officer to the Normanton and District Joint Isolation Hospital. His predecessor in office, in addition to the above, held the appointment of medical officer of health to the Normanton Urban District Council.

Dr. Sandiford does not hold a diploma in public health, but he takes interest in his work and he tells me that he is about to undertake a systematic house to house visitation of the district in company with the inspector of nuisances. Up to the present he has only visited such premises as have been brought specially to his notice: the duties of his other offices, in addition, keep him in contact with the district.

There would, however, be much advantage in having a whole-time expert officer for this and adjoining districts. The Normanton and District Joint Hospital District—comprising the Urban Districts of Altofts, Castleford, Featherstone, Normanton and Whitwood—would form a very suitable combined area for the purpose of such an appointment, the medical officer of health acting also as medical superintendent of the isolation hospital. As much as £380 is at present paid to six different private practitioners for this service. A medical officer of health, specially trained and qualified in public health and in fever hospital administration, would be in a better position to give skilled advice and would have more ample opportunity of investigating the origin and spread of infectious diseases than a medical man in private practice who devotes to his public health work such time as he can spare from his other duties. The whole-time officer would, furthermore, be free from the embarrassment necessarily associated with the searching out of overlooked cases of infectious disease and “carrier” cases which is felt by a medical officer of health who is conducting such investigations among the patients of his fellow practitioners.

* After his survey of the district in 1904, the county medical officer made a similar recommendation.

The *inspector of nuisances*, Mr. J. C. Coates, who was appointed in 1901, and who possesses the certificate of the Royal Sanitary Institute, receives an annual salary of £60, with repayment of half that amount from county council funds. He receives also £45 a year as collector to the council, and £70 as surveyor and water inspector; he has a house rent free with gas and coal for acting as curator at the cemetery. Mr. Coates manages the sewage works, superintends the scavenging, and inspects canal boats, cowsheds and slaughter houses, duties for which no separate salary is assigned. He has an intimate knowledge of his district and has been instrumental in securing numerous sanitary improvements in Altofts.

It cannot be said that progress in dealing with middens and back yards has been as rapid as it should have been; the fact that there are as many as 80 back yards each containing one or more midden privies, with no entry to them for excrement removal purposes beyond a narrow passage which carts cannot enter, indicates a tolerance in Altofts of undesirable conditions. The pollution of yards and streets by heaps of filth thrown on their surface in process of emptying the middens undoubtedly creates a nuisance, and though these surfaces are afterwards scraped as clean as possible and powdered with lime and copperas, the danger exists that in the circumstances, infected filth might be carried into houses by the boots, by the wind, or by flies. This apparently is the chief matter which calls for adverse criticism of the sanitary administration of the district, and it therefore deserves the earliest and most earnest consideration of the council.

Infectious Diseases.—The following table gives the number of notified cases and deaths from certain infectious diseases in Altofts for the period 1897–1909 :—

YEAR.			SCARLET FEVER.		DIPHTHERIA, INCLUDING MEMB. CROUP.		TYPHOID FEVER.		MEASLES.	
			Cases.	Deaths.	Cases.	Deaths.	Cases.	Deaths.	Cases.	Deaths.
1897	...	...	82	6	6	1	7	3	8	—
1898	...	...	28	1	2	—	2	—	5	—
1899	...	...	6	1	2	—	8	1	107	2
1900	...	...	24	—	—	—	5	2	131	10
1901	...	...	2	1	1	—	6	—	—	—
1902	...	...	3	—	1	1	5	2	40	3
1903	...	...	23	2	—	—	1	1	—	—
1904	...	...	21	—	—	—	5	—	213	8
1905	...	...	47	1	73	16	2	1	3	—
1906	...	...	39	—	8	—	2	—	201	7
1907	...	...	10	—	—	—	—	—	2	—
1908	...	...	12	—	1	—	8	1	71	2
1909	...	...	26	2	1	—	7	1	177	3

On receipt of a notification certificate, the medical officer of health sends it to the inspector of nuisances; he also visits the infected premises, examines the surroundings of the case as to possible sources of infection, and as to the isolation accommodation available for the case, and telephones to the hospital if the patient

is to be removed there. The hospital ambulance is sent with a nurse and two men.

The inspector of nuisances visits and examines the premises, helps to remove the patient, if necessary, distributes handbills of advice, disinfects the premises, tells the parents to exclude the children from school, and keeps the household under observation for a fortnight. Where patients have been treated at home, cards are sent to him when houses are ready for disinfection.

Hospital isolation is readily accepted in this district, but the hospital was overfull at the time of my visit and fresh cases could not then be admitted.

Isolation hospital.—Cases of infectious disease are isolated in the hospitals of the Normanton and District Joint Hospital Committee. (See extract from my report on Normanton in Appendix.) At the time of my visit to the Ackton Hall hospital it was very much overcrowded.

Disinfection of clothing and bedding, when cases have been removed to hospital, is effected by means of the Washington Lyon's steam disinfectant at that institution. Articles are carried to and from the hospital in separate vehicles.

When cases are treated at home, steam disinfection of clothing, &c. is not employed, and reliance is placed upon sulphur fumigation.

Infantile mortality.—For the years 1898 to 1907 the annual mean was 128 infantile deaths per 1,000 births registered. In 1908 the figure was 132, and it has varied from 81 to 190 in the period mentioned. No special measures have been taken to deal with this matter, and although for a mining and privy midden district the average figure is not a high one, there is no doubt that some good would result if the council adopted the Notification of Births Act, 1907, and made arrangements proper for the education of mothers and those who have charge of infants.

The Midwives Act is administered under the supervision of the medical officer of the West Riding County Council. Lectures are given at various centres in the county to instruct the midwives. The Wakefield Board of Guardians, in which union Altofts is situated, pay fees to medical men called in by midwives to poor patients under the rules of the Central Midwives Board. Five midwives are registered in Altofts. They are systematically visited by the county medical officer and his assistants.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

1. The council should make application to the Local Government Board for the issue of an Order declaring to be in force in the district such of the Parts or Sections of the Public Health Acts Amendment Act, 1907, as are likely to be of service to the district, particularly those dealing with privies, back yards and the provision of sinks.

2. The council should deal with the midden privies in their district with a view to their conversion as soon as possible to the water carriage system : in particular, they should deal at once with the middens in yards where scavenging carts cannot enter.

3. The council should secure the paving of back yards, passages and back streets.

4. The council should take measures to reduce the infantile mortality. These measures should include the adoption of the Notification of Births Act, and the making of arrangements proper for the visiting and instruction of mothers and those who have charge of infants.

5. It is desirable that as soon as an opportunity offers, the council should negotiate with other adjacent local authorities, mentioned on page 5, to obtain the services of a trained medical officer of health, who shall not be engaged in private medical practice.

6. The council should adopt byelaws based upon the Board's model series, in place of their present obsolete set.

7. The Normanton and District Joint Hospital Committee should proceed to enlarge their hospital at Ackton Hall as soon as possible.

In conclusion, I have much pleasure in thanking the officers of the district council, the county medical officer, and others, for much assistance readily rendered to me in the course of my inspection.

J. SPENCER LOW.

APPENDIX.

EXTRACT FROM DR. SPENCER LOW'S REPORT ON THE SANITARY CIRCUMSTANCES AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE NORMANTON URBAN DISTRICT. No. 32.

Isolation hospital.—In 1899 the Urban Districts of Altofts, Castleford, Featherstone, Normanton and Whitwood were constituted a hospital district under the Isolation Hospitals Act, 1893. An isolation hospital for cases of infectious disease other than small pox has been provided at Ackton Hall, in a central situation. The hospital was built to accommodate eight cases of enteric fever, in a block containing two wards, 24 cases of scarlet fever, in two ward blocks each containing two wards, and eight other cases in a third block containing four two bed wards, *i.e.*, 40 beds in all. Owing to the number of patients received into hospital in the autumn of 1909, the buildings have been much overcrowded. On the day of my visit, no fewer than 69 patients were under treatment, and some other cases could not be admitted for want of room. Five of the nurses on duty were sleeping in two small isolation wards which reduced the number of beds available for patients. The matron, 10 other nurses, and 11 maid servants, 22 persons in all, were sleeping in the administration block in 13 bedrooms, originally intended to accommodate 16 persons.

Three of the staff were suffering from enteric fever and one from scarlet fever at the time of my visit.

In 1909, up to November 22nd, 201 cases of scarlet fever, 58 of typhoid fever, and 34 of diphtheria had been admitted to hospital.

In 1908 the estimated population of the hospital district was 57,590. There is need for extending the hospital by building new wards and for enlarging the administration block.

Arrangements have been made for the isolation of cases of small-pox in the hospital near Glass Houghton, provided by the Castleford Urban District Council, and now rented by the Joint Hospital Committee.

